

The Asanid of the Indian Subcontinent in the Sahihayn



صحيح البخاري - صحيح مسلم

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The Asanid of the Indian Subcontinent in the Sahihayn
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Preface

Since Shah Wali Allah, the *muhaddith* of Delhi, lit the flame of hadith in the Indian Subcontinent in the 12th century after Hijri, the inheritors of his legacy have continued to keep this flame burning bright. From Deoband to Saharanpur and from Lucknow to Delhi, the horizon has been brightened with the beautiful words of the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) echoing through the hallowed corridors of the great centres of Islamic learning.

Shaykh Muhammad, the founder and director of the Cordoba Academy and a tireless student of hadith, has compiled the various *asanid* of the Indian Subcontinent which are amongst the highest in the world. We have compiled these *asanid* in this book for the benefit of the student of Hadith and to create a thirst in the heart for the study of Hadith. Along with this we have included as background from the words of the *muhaddithin* and *'ulama* about the importance of the *isnad* in the Shari'ah and it being a blessing upon the Ummah. We are truly indebted to our *'ulama* who have beautifully preserved this *din* for us by being dedicated and scrupulous in their services and studies. May Allah reward them a special reward from amongst His rewards.

We hope that the flame of Hadith that Shah Wali Allah had lightened continues to brighten the world and it may be a source of perpetual bliss. The *muhaddithin* who have sacrificed their lives in the pursuit of Hadith are true examples of the scholarship of Islam that we may take lesson from in these times of increases *fitan*. For surely, the Shari'ah has been preserved in every generation by the ink of the scholars and the blood of the martyrs. And for this generation we seek out our scholars and martyrs to assume this elevated seat.

It is only the Mercy of Allah that this compilation has come to fruition and we pray that it is made a witness for us on al-Qiyamah towards our book of good deeds. May Allah reward the Hadith masters who toiled in the field of Hadith for us to reap the harvests. We also pray for Shaykh Muhammad who is a light of beacon for the East and the West in these times of darkness. May Allah forgive us and forgive you and include us all in His Mercy. Amin!

`Abd Allah bin Muhammad al-Afriqui
Johannesburg, South Africa
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The Uniqueness and Importance of Isnad

Verily Allah, all praises and thanks are due to him alone, has blessed this Ummah with the honour of *isnad*. It is that continuous and unbroken chain that serves to preserve and protect this Ummah (nation) from any falsities. It is a unique and salient feature of this Ummah and no other nation has ever in the past been bestowed with it. Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (Allah have mercy upon him) in his book *Sharaf Ashab al-Hadith* (The honour of the people of Hadith) narrates from Muhammad ibn Hatim ibn Muzaffar (Allah have mercy upon him) that he said:

“Indeed Allah has blessed, honoured and privileged this Ummah with *isnad* and no earlier nor later Ummah has ever had this blessing, rather the books they have in their hands are a mixture of sayings. They do not possess any differentiation between what was revealed to their Prophets in the Torah and the Bible and what was stated and taken from those who were not trustworthy. However, this Ummah selects only the narrations from those who were steadfast and well known in their times for their honesty and trustworthiness, who took from those who has similar qualities to them up to the end of the narration. Then these reports are researched with the utmost diligence to identify which narrator has the strongest memory and is the best in recording narrations, and which narrator spent more time in the company with those they narrated from their contemporaries. Then the text itself is analysed from over twenty angles allowing for each alphabet compared with the other. Is this not then, from one of the greatest blessings that Allah has bestowed upon this Ummah?”

Now I would like to provide a brief compilation of quotations from the great *muhaddithin* and *salaf al-salihin* (Allah have mercy upon them).

- 1) Imam al-Shafi'i (Allah have mercy upon him) said, “The example of the one who seeks knowledge (without *isnad*) is like that of the one whom carries wood in the night wherein which there is a snake that bites him without him realising.”
- 2) Imam 'Abd Allah ibn al-Mubarak (Allah have mercy upon him) said, “*Isnad* is from the *din*, if it were not for the *isnad*, whoever wanted to say (ascribe) something would say whatever they wanted to say.”
- 3) Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (Allah have mercy upon him) said, “Seeking the high *isnad* is a Sunnah of our *salaf*”

- 4) Imam Yazid ibn Zari' (Allah have mercy upon him) would say, "In every religion there have been knights and the knights of this Ummah are the people of *asanid*."
- 5) Imam Sufyan al-Thawri (Allah have mercy upon him) would say, "*Isnad* is the weapon of a *mu'min* (believer) so if he does not have a weapon with what will he fight with?" And he would say, "Increase yourselves in Hadith for it is a weapon."
- 6) Imam al-Zuhri (Allah have mercy upon him) said, "Is the roof raised without the use of a ladder?" (The *asanid* are the stairs through which we reach the classical texts)
- 7) Sultan Ibrahim ibn Adham (Allah have mercy upon him) said, "Verily Allah shows mercy upon this Ummah due to the journeys of the people of Hadith."
- 8) Shaykh Ibn al-'Arabi (Allah have mercy upon him) once said, "Allah has indeed blessed this Ummah with *isnad* which he never gave to anyone. So be careful and do not adopt the ways of the Jews and Christians by reporting without *isnad* thus confiscating this bounty of Allah upon you."
- 9) Shaykh Muhammad ibn Aslam al-Tusi (Allah have mercy upon him) once said, "Closeness to *isnad* is closeness to Allah, for without doubt closeness to our Apostle (Allah bless him and grant him peace) is closeness to Allah."
- 10) The *Musnid* of his time, 'Abd al-Hayy al-Kittani (Allah have mercy upon him) said, "The higher the *isnad* of a narrator, the closer they are to Allah's Apostle (Allah bless him and grant him peace)."
- 11) Ibn Rahmun (Allah have mercy upon him) said, "Seeking *ijazah* in the past and present was amongst the Sunnah of the '*ulama* of Hadith in order to preserve the tradition of *isnad* and in turn the Shari'ah. However, it has been forgotten in these times and *ijazah* and *sanad* have been neglected because scholars thought that knowledge was only in teaching and being outstanding."
- 12) Imam Abu Nasr Ahmad ibn Nasr al-Faqih (Allah have mercy upon him) once said, "There is nothing harder upon the people of *ilhad* (deviance) nor more despised by them than hearing Hadith and its narration with *isnad*."

- 13) People came to visit Imam Yahya ibn Ma'in while he was suffering in his last illness before his death and asked him what do you desire? He answered, "An empty house, and a high *isnad*."
- 14) On one occasion Shaykh Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn Ishaq (Allah have mercy upon him) was lecturing a person when he started narrating a Hadith by saying, "He said..." The man stopped him and said, "Until when will you keep saying this, leave saying, 'he said' (narrating *ahadith*)", so the Shaykh said to him, "Get up you *kafir* (disbeliever) and it is forbidden upon you to ever come into my house again." Then he looked at the students and said, "I have never forbidden anyone from entering my house except this person."
- 15) In summarising, I, this lowly slave of Allah, Muhammad Daniel say: "It suffices the honour of a *mu'min* that their name is forever connected to the names of the greatest scholars of this Ummah. And it suffices the honour and blessing of a *mu'min* that their name be connected to that of the one whom is the most honourable and blessed of this Ummah (Allah bless him and grant him peace). Is it not strange therefore, that today we find Muslims that reject the narration with *ijazah* and *isnad* which continues to be a light for this Ummah!?"

Introducing the Asanid of the Sahihayn

We explore the highest¹ *asanid* (chains of narration) of two of the six canonical works of Hadith, the works categorised as the Sahihayn; the *al-Jami' al-Sahih* of Imam Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Isma'il ibn Ibrahim al-Ju'fi al-Bukhari (Allah have mercy upon him), and the *al-Musnad al-Sahih* of Imam Abu 'I-Husayn Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj ibn Muslim al-Qushayri al-Naysapuri (Allah have mercy upon him)

Firstly, I would like to draw the reader's attention to fact that we will only discuss those *asanid* that have *sama'a* (aural transmission) in as many of the *tabaqat* (generations of the chain) as possible.² I will not discuss the *asanid* that come through *ijazah aa'ma* (general permission) as the *muhaddithin* have stated these *asanid* are inferior to those that have *sama'a*.

The benefit of looking at *sama'i asanid* only, is that we purge ourselves of the *asanid* that are dubious and untrustworthy, such as those that various charlatans boast connect them to the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) through 13, 7 and sometimes even 3 intermediaries. These *asanid* do not meet the stringent conditions stipulated by the *muhaddithin* as they are laden with *majahil* (unknown persons) have *inqita'* (breaks/gaps in the *sanad*) or are even related by Jinn.

Throughout my travels and travails, I have found that the most prevalent and trustworthy *asanid* that are in existence today are those from the Indian subcontinent. This is mainly owing to the reality that in the past two centuries the seminaries of the Arab world neglected the tradition of aural transmission in the six canonical works of Hadith. In contrast to this, we find that the seminaries in the Indian subcontinent have made the study of these works a staple ingredient in the diet of every scholar that graduates in a tradition that dates back to the greatest Hadith scholar of his time, Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi (Allah have mercy upon him).

Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi set out from India to the Blessed Lands in the search of the Sacred Sciences and was honoured to study the books of Hadith with several of the leading *muhaddithin* of his time. Upon completing his studies with them he was granted *ijazah* to teach the Sacred Sciences and returned to India.

¹ The 'highest *sanad*' is the literal term used by the *muhaddithin* and by it they mean the *sanad* that has the fewest intermediaries between one's own teacher and the author/compiler of the text and if relevant, back to the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace).

² Up until now, it has only been established that two sacred texts have complete *sama'a* in every *tabaqah* of their transmission and they are the *Muwatta* of Imam Malik and the *Sahih* of Imam al-Bukhari (Allah have mercy upon them).

In the terms of the *muhaddithin* he is known as the *umdat* or pillar of *riwayah* (narration) in India, which means the vast majority of *asanid* go through him.³ After his demise, Allah blessed his family with the honour of serving the Sacred Sciences for well over 150 years, so much so that scholars from every background and school of thought came to study at their feet.

Now that we are aware of this, it becomes easy for us to understand the *asanid* of the Indian subcontinent region and if we know the year and institute that a particular scholar studied at or with whom they studied with, we are able to identify their *isnad* and its '*uluw* (lit. height, but technically how few intermediaries there are) Then we only need to count how many narrators there are between the living scholar and Shah Wali Allah in order to calculate if the *sanad* of that scholar is high or low.

To best illustrate this, let us analyse the *asanid* of the three most famous chains that are prevalent in India today.

We will first look at the *asanid* of ***Sahih al-Bukhari***.

³ This was confirmed by Shaykh Muhammad Zakariyyah al-Kandhlawi after his research on the matter which included writing to every famous seat of learning in India requesting them to provide their *asanid* so that he could study them.

The Asanid of Sahih al-Bukhari

Silsilah al-Qasimiyyah

(The *isnad* of the students that graduate from Dar al-'Ulum, Deoband and are given the title Qasimi)

For the student this *isnad* has *sama'a* through 7 intermediaries going back to Shah Wali Allah which we would regard as a high *isnad* as it is not uncommon to find institutes with 9 or 10 intermediaries.

1. Shaykh al-Qadi Mu'tasim Billah al-Qasimi (May Allah preserve him)
2. Who narrates from Husayn Ahmad al-Madani (1296-1377)⁴
3. Who narrates from Mahmud Hasan al-Deobandi (1268-1339)
4. Who narrates from Muhammad Qasim al-Nanautwi (1248-1297)
5. Who narrates from Shah 'Abd al-Ghani al-Mujaddidi (1235-1295)
6. Who narrates from Shah Muhammad Ishaq al-Dihlawi (1197-1262)
7. Who narrates from Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Dihlawi (1159-1239)
8. Who narrates from Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi (1114-1176)

Silsilah al-Mazahirriyyah

(The *isnad* of the students that graduate from Mazahir al-'Ulum, Saharanpur and are given the title Mazahiri)

For the student this *isnad* has *sama'a* through 7 intermediaries going back to Shah Wali Allah which we would regard as a high *isnad*.

1. Shaykh Mohammed Yunus al-Jaunpuri (May Allah preserve him)
2. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Muhammad Zakariyya Kandhalawi (1315-1402)⁵
3. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Khalil Ahmad al-Saharanpuri (1269-1346)

⁴ Shaykh Husayn Ahmad al-Madani (Allah have mercy upon him) taught *Sahih al-Bukhari* at Dar al-'Ulum, Deoband to thousands of students over a period of 28 years before migrating to the illuminated city of Madinah. He passed away over 54 years ago (1957 CE) which means that for a student to have studied with him, they must be at least 74 years old. Due to this fact and based upon my extensive research, today there remains less than 40 scholars alive who are his direct students.

⁵ Shaykh Muhammad Zakariyya (Allah have mercy upon him) taught *Sahih al-Bukhari* at Mazahir al-'Ulum, Saharanpur to thousands of students over a period exceeding 50 years before migrating to the illuminated city of Madinah. He passed away 29 years ago (1982 CE) and left behind hundreds of students, many of whom continue to teach worldwide with the majority of them based in India.

4. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Shah 'Abd al-Qayyum al-Budhanwi (?-1298)
5. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Shah Muhammad Ishaq al-Dihlawi (1197-1262)
6. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Dihlawi (1159-1239)
7. Who narrates to *Kitab al-Hajj* from Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi (1114-1176)

Silsilah al-Muradabadiyyah

(The *isnad* of the students that graduate from other Islamic seminaries in India such as those who have studied in Lucknow, Bareilly, Muradabad and surrounding areas.

This *isnad* with *sama'a* has 4 intermediaries going back to Shah Wali Allah which we would regard as an extremely high *isnad*. The only drawback in this *isnad* is that Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman al-Amrohi and Shaykh Fadl al-Rahman only studied a few hadith from the *Sahih* of Imam al-Bukhari and so this affects the quality of the *isnad*, because the more the quantity of *sama'a* between narrators of a text the better the quality of *isnad*.

1. Shaykh Ahmad Ali al-Lajpuri (d. 2011 CE), Shaykh Nasir Ahmad Khan (d. 2010 CE), Shaykh Muhammad Qasim Sema (d. 2007 CE)⁶
2. Who narrate the complete *Sahih* from 'Abd al-Rahman al-Amrohi
3. Who narrates a portion⁷ of the *Sahih* from Fadl al-Rahman Ganj Muradabadi (1208-1313)
4. Who narrates a portion of the *Sahih* from Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Dihlawi (1159-1239)
5. Who narrates to *Kitab al-Hajj*⁸ from Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi (1114-1176)

⁶ All of the scholars above have passed into the mercy of Allah within the past few years and to the best of my knowledge, there is no one alive today that studied *Sahih al-Bukhari* with Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman al-Amrohi who passed away over 67 years ago. Other famous students of Shaykh Fadl al-Rahman Ganj Muradabadi include, Ashraf 'Ali al-Thanawi, Muhammad 'Ali al-Monghiri, Ahmad Raza Khan al-Barelwi, Abd al-Rahman al-Panipati and others. I am not aware of any direct student of theirs that has studied *Sahih al-Bukhari* with them.

⁷ It has not been established yet, if Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman al-Amrohi actually heard any portion of the text.

⁸ Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz completed the rest of the text with his father's main student, Nur Allah al-Siddiqui (Allah have mercy on him).

The Asanid of Sahih Muslim

Silsilah al-Rahmaniyyah

(The *isnad* of the students that graduated from the now closed seminary in Delhi known as al-Jami'ah al-Rahmaniyah.)

For the student this *isnad* has *sama'a* through only 5 intermediaries going back to Shah Wali Allah and by virtue is the undisputed highest *sanad* in the world with only 21 intermediaries back to Imam Muslim.⁹ It also possesses two other unique features that cause it to stand out from other contemporary *asanid*.

- The quality of the *sanad* is unparalleled because the first four scholars all have complete *sama'a* in the text unlike the other *asanid*.
- Shaykh Ahmad Allah al-Pratapgarhi also read the complete *Sahih* with the famous Yemeni *muhaddith*, Shaykh Husayn ibn Muhsin al-Ansari so this allows his students to narrate through two paths and as *Sahih Muslim* lacks *sama'a* in some *tabaqat*, both the Indian path strengthens the Yemeni path and vice-versa.

1. Shaykh Zahir al-Din al-Mubarakpuri (May Allah preserve him) (1341-)
2. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Ahmad Allah al-Pratapgarhi (1297-1362)
3. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Nadhir Husayn al-Dihlawi (1220-1320)
4. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Mohammed Ishaq al-Dihlawi (1197-1262)
5. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Dihlawi (1159-1239)
6. Who narrates a portion of the *Sahih* from Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi (1114-1176)¹⁰

Silsilah al-Mazahirriyyah

(The *isnad* of the students that graduate from Mazahir al-'Ulum, Saharanpur and are given the title Mazahiri)

⁹ As the highest *isnad* that Imam Muslim has in his collection going back to the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) is from the *ruba'iyat* (4 people in the chain) it would mean that the teacher has 24 intermediaries between him and the Messenger (Allah bless him and grant him peace) and his student would become the 25th.

¹⁰ Based upon research, I do not hold full conviction that Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz heard the complete text with his father, as he passed away at the age of 16, but it is established that he read the complete text with his father's main student Nur Allah al-Siddiqui (Allah have mercy upon him).

For the student this *isnad* has *sama'a* through 7 intermediaries going back to Shah Wali Allah which we would regard as a high *isnad*.

1. Shaykh Mohammed Yunus al-Jaunpuri (May Allah preserve him)¹¹
2. Who narrates most of the text from Manzur Ahmad al-Saharanpuri (?-1387)
3. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Khalil Ahmad al-Saharanpuri (1269-1346)
4. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Muhammad Mazhar al-Nanautwi (1238-1302)
5. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Mamluk 'Ali al-Nanautwi (?-1267)
6. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Shah Rashid al-Din Khan (?-1248)
7. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Dihlawi (1159-1239)
8. Who narrates a portion of the *Sahih* from Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi (1114-1176)

Silsilah al-Qasimiyyah

(The *isnad* of the students that graduate from Dar al-'Ulum Deoband and are given the title Qasimi)

For the student this *isnad* has *sama'a* through 7 intermediaries going back to Shah Wali Allah which we would regard as a high *isnad* as it is not uncommon to find institutes with 9 or 10 intermediaries.

1. Shaykh Bilal Asghar (May Allah preserve him)¹²
2. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Muhammad Ibrahim al-Balyawi (1304-1387)
3. Who narrates a portion of the *Sahih* Mahmud Hasan al-Deobandi (1268-1339)
4. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Muhammad Qasim al-Nanautwi (1248-1297)
5. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Shah 'Abd al-Ghani al-Mujaddidi (1235-1295)

¹¹ Shaykh Muhammad Yunus is the teacher of *Sahih al-Bukhari* at Mazahir al-'Ulum in Saharanpur, a position he has occupied for over 30 years. He also narrates from Shaykh Zakariyyah al-Kandhlawi from Shaykh Khalil al-Saharanpuri from Shaykh 'Abd al-Qayyum from Shah Muhammad Ishaq which would make the *sanad* higher, but the quality of this *sanad* is not as good as the one presented above. The reason for this is that the first three scholars only read a small portion of the text to each other. There are other *asanid* for these scholars, but they are of a similar quality.

¹² Shaykh Bilal Asghar stems from a family of scholars going back centuries. He currently teaches at Dar al-'Ulum Deoband and I have had the privilege of meeting him there and then hosting him for some time in which I studied with him.

6. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Shah Muhammad Ishaq al-Dihlawi (1197-1262)
7. Who narrates the complete *Sahih* from Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Dihlawi (1159-1239)
8. Who narrates a portion of the *Sahih* from Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi (1114-1176)

Appendix: Importance of Isnad and Learning from a Teacher

Allah Almighty has honoured the Ummah of the best of creation, our master Muhammad (Allah bless him and grant him peace) with many special characteristics that were not given to any other nation before us.

From among these favours is the unrivalled and unique feature of *isnad* in relating the various sciences of Islamic knowledge. *isnad* was regarded by the early Muslims (*salaf*) as the first and primary condition in relating any aspect of Shari'ah even if it was merely relating one word.

With this, Allah Most High fulfilled his promise of preserving the *din* which includes the Book of Allah, the Sunnah and the various Islamic sciences that are indispensable in understanding the former two.

Allah Most High says:

“We have without doubt, sent down the Message; and we will assuredly guard it.” (*Surah al-Hijr*, v.9)

The “message” here refers to the Book of Allah and also the Sunnah of His blessed Messenger (Allah bless him and grant him peace), for whatever the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) says is from Allah Almighty, as Allah Most High says:

“Nor does he (the Messenger of Allah) say (aught) of (his own) desire. It is no less than revelation (*wahy*) sent down to him.” (*al-Najm*, v. 3-4)

The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) explained both verbally and practically the contents of the Book of Allah. The Qur'an is quite ambiguous and limited in stating the laws of Shari'ah, and the Messenger of Allah's (Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) duty was to explain these injunctions.

Allah Most High says to his Messenger (Allah bless him and grant him peace):

“And We have sent down unto you the Message (Qur'an); that you may explain clearly to men what is sent for them.” (*al-Nahl*, v. 44)

So the promise of preserving the *din* is not restricted to the Qur'an, rather it encompasses the Sunnah and also the Companion's (Allah be pleased with them) understanding of the Sunnah and the understanding of those who took from them.

Isnad is a unique feature of the Messenger of Allah's (Allah bless him and grant

him peace) Ummah. No other nation, religion or community can claim or boast to have such rigorous analysis of the various aspects of their faith.

Early Muslim scholars examined and analysed each and every statement that came to them, whether it was the statement of the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace), his companions (Allah be pleased with them all) or anyone else. They studied the life and character of those who were part of the transmitting chain (*isnad*) in the strictest way possible.

Thus, the Ummah witnessed an amazing introduction of the “science of studying the reporters of Hadith” (*rijal al-hadith*) which was unprecedented and is unrivalled till today. The recording of the names, dates of birth, dates of demise, qualities and characteristics of thousands and thousands of people is something that only Muslims possess.

Books such as, *Tahzib al-Kamal* by al-Mizzi, *Tahzib al-Tahzib* by Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, *Mizan al-I’tidal* by Dhahabi and *Lisan al-Mizan* by Ibn Hajar are just some examples of this amazing phenomenon. There are also books that are dedicated to preserving the biographies of the Sahabah, such as *Tabaqat* of Ibn Sa’d, *al-Isti’ab* by Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *Usd al-Ghaba* by Ibn al-Athir and *al-Isaba* by Ibn Hajar, in which the biographies of approximately ten thousand companions (Allah be pleased with them all) have been covered.

Imam ‘Abd Allah ibn al-Mubarak (Allah have mercy on him) said, “*Isnad* is part of religion (*din*), and if it was not for *isnad*, one would have said whatever one desired. When it is said (to the one who speaks without an *isnad*), ‘Who informed you?’ He remains silent and bewildered.” (See: Introduction to *Sahih Muslim*, 1:87, *al-Jami’ li akhlaq al-rawi wa adab al-sami’* and others)

He (‘Abd Allah ibn al-Mubarak) also stated, “The one who seeks matters of his *din* without an *isnad* is similar to the one who climbs to the roof without a ladder.”

Sufyan al-Thawri (Allah have mercy on him) said, “*Isnad* is the weapon of a believer. When one does not possess a weapon, then with what will he combat?.”

Imam Shafi’i (Allah have mercy on him) says, “The example of the one who seeks Hadith without an *isnad* is of a person who gathers wood in the night. He carries a bundle of sticks not knowing that there is a snake in it.” (meaning, he gathers and collects all types of narrations, the genuine and spurious)

Baqiyya ibn al-Walid (Allah have mercy on him) once related to Hammad ibn Zaid (Allah have mercy on him) certain narrations that were void of *isnad*. So Hammad said, “If only they had wings.”

Imam Ibn Taymiyyah (Allah have mercy on him) states, “*Isnad* is a unique feature of this Ummah and Islam. Then from among the Muslims, it is a speciality of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa ‘l-Jama’ah.”

(The above statements have been recorded by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Fattah Abu Ghudda (Allah have mercy on him) in his excellent work, *al-Isnad min ‘l-Din*, p. 18-20)

These and many other similar statements of the predecessors imply that the early Muslims held *isnad* to be indispensable in order to acquire knowledge. So much so, that in order to relate even one word in their books, they would mention a whole chain of transmission that covered three or four lines.

Isnad was not only mentioned in order to narrate Prophetic traditions (hadith), rather, it was related for every form of knowledge, such as the exegesis (*tafsir*) of the Qur’an, stories of the pious and worshippers, incidents of history, etc.

After the Prophetic traditions were gathered in the great compilations, such as *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim* and others, and other compilations in various other Islamic sciences, it was not deemed necessary to relate every statement with a chain of transmission going back to its original authority. Rather, it was sufficient to have an *isnad* or *sanad* going back to the author. The *isnad* of the author going back to the original authority would be mentioned in his book.

Till this very day, we have scholars from around the globe relating Prophetic traditions and other branches of Islamic knowledge with a chain that goes all the way back to the authors of the respective books.

The six major books of Hadith are generally taught with an *isnad* that goes back to their authors, and from them to the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace). Many scholars are seen to travel and make distant journeys in order to acquire *ijazah* and a higher form of *isnad*.

In terms of *isnad* with regards to prophetic traditions (hadith), the scholars of the Indian subcontinent are (perhaps) at the forefront. The science of Hadith is given special attention there and almost every student that studies in the various Islamic institutions (Dar al-‘Ulums) is blessed with an *isnad* in each of the major books of Hadith. Even major Arab scholars are seen to travel to Indo/Pak in order to acquire *ijazah* and *isnad* from the great Hadith masters.

In terms of other branches of knowledge, such as the science of Tajwid, Fiqh, etc, we see the Arab scholars at the forefront in relating and teaching the various books with *isnad*. Major scholars in Syria and elsewhere have a chain in the recitation and memorization of the Qur’an that goes back to the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) via the angel Jibril to Allah Almighty Himself.

The major books in Hanafi Fiqh (and other *madhhabs*) are taught with a *isnad/sanad* going back to their authors and to Imam Abu Hanifa (Allah have mercy on him) himself. Books in other sciences are also taught and related in a similar manner.

In conclusion, *isnad* (or *sanad*) is a unique feature with which our Ummah has been blessed. It has always been regarded to be indispensable in teaching and seeking knowledge. Scholars mention, that even today, one should acquire knowledge from a scholar who has an *isnad* or at least a teacher who he studied with. Having a complete chain of transmission is not a pre-requisite for teaching. However, what is necessary, is that the one from whom one takes his/her knowledge, is amongst those who studied by other *shuyukh*. This is discussed further in the following section.

Allah Most High created man different from animals. Animals are not in need of a teacher or trainer in a way man is. We see for example that, when a fish is born, it automatically begins to swim without being taught how to do so. If a man was to take the example of the fish and throw his new-born baby into the river thinking that he will swim, then he is without doubt insane, for a fish is not in need of an instructor who instructs it how to swim, while a man needs a tutor to teach him to swim.

Take the example of the new-born chick; the moment it comes out of the egg, it begins to nibble at food without being taught. However, a human baby will not know how to eat unless it is taught practically how to consume the various types of foods.

It is the Sunnah (way) of Allah Almighty that he fashioned human beings in such a way that they are in need of practical instruction from a teacher in order to learn any science, technique or craft. From the moment one is born, one is in need of practical teaching and guidance in all aspects of life.

There is almost consensus on the fact that it is virtually impossible for one to master any science or art in the world without the guidance and tutelage of a qualified teacher under whom one practically learns the fundamentals of that science. It is not possible to gain expertise in any field unless one submits himself to the guidance of a teacher.

Take for example the science of medicine. If one was to think that I will read and study the books on medical science in the comfort of my home, thus become a medical practitioner, then he will be considered to be insane by almost everybody. If this individual was to perform surgery on a patient or begins to treat people, then his patients will not end up anywhere other than the graveyard!

Even if this individual is very talented and knowledgeable, the guidance of a tutor is indispensable. Suppose this individual is able to understand the books of

medical science and he masters the language in which the books are written, he will still not be permitted to work as a physician or surgeon unless he studies under the guidance of a qualified person in the field of medical science. No government will ever allow this individual to take up the medical profession, due to the fact that he did not pursue the method necessary in order to take up this profession.

It is the same with all the other sciences of the world in that the guidance of a teacher is necessary. Nobody would allow you to practice law until you don't attend a law school and learn from a qualified barrister. Let alone the major sciences, even the simple art of cooking is not achieved by merely reading a book. There are several books published explaining the methods of cooking different types of food. If an individual who had never cooked in his life before, cooked by merely reading the procedure of cooking mentioned in the book, then you can imagine what the outcome would be!

So, it is the nature of man that he cannot acquire knowledge merely from books unless he has a teacher and mentor to train and guide him. He needs to stay in the company of a qualified teacher who will help and assist him on every step and save him from the errors that may be committed. This applies to every science, art and craft, and sacred and religious knowledge is of no exception. It is not possible for one to acquire sacred knowledge unless one is trained by a qualified teacher and mentor.

This is the secret behind a book or scripture never being revealed except Allah Almighty sent a Messenger to explain its contents. There are many examples where a Prophet was sent by Allah Almighty and no book or scripture was revealed unto him, but there is not a single case where a book was revealed without a Prophet carrying it.

The simple reason behind this is that if a book was sent on its own, man would not possess the capability to understand it without the teaching of a Prophet. If Allah wished, He could have sent the book on its own. Every individual could have found a book when he woke up in the morning, and a voice from the heavens would have declared: "Obey what is in this book" but Allah, the Creator of mankind, who is fully aware of the human instincts, chose to send the book with a teacher who would explain the contents of the book, both practically and verbally.

Allah Most High explains this concept in the following verse:

"Allah did confer a great favour on the believers when He sent amongst them a Messenger from among themselves, reciting upon them verses (of the book), sanctifying them, and teaching them the scripture (book) and wisdom, while before that, they had been in manifest error." (*Ali Imran*, v. 164)

Similarly, Allah Most High says:

“And We have sent down unto you (O Messenger) the message, that you may explain clearly to men what is sent for them.” (*al-Nahl*, v. 44)

Therefore, it is the Sunnah of Allah Almighty that He has kept two means for the guidance of mankind. One is through the medium of His books (*kitab Allah*) and the other is the Prophets and their successors. Hence, both, the book of Allah (*kitab Allah*) and men of Allah (*rijal Allah*) are necessary for one's guidance. Sufficing with one of the two will surely lead to deviation.

At this point, it would be useful to quote the great scholar of *usul*, Imam al-Shatibi (Allah have mercy on him). The following is the crux of what he stated on this issue in his renowned treatise *al-Muwafaqat*:

“The most beneficial and effectual way of gaining knowledge is by learning it from those who are masters in their fields. It is necessary to have a teacher in aspects of knowledge that need explanation and interpretation. It is not impossible for one to gain knowledge without a teacher; however, normally it is observed that a teacher is of utmost importance. This is, somewhat, agreed upon by the scholars.

Scholars said: “Sacred knowledge was in the hearts of men, then it moved into the books and the keys to these books are in the hands of scholars (*rijal*).” This implies the necessity of acquiring knowledge from the people who master it.

The basis for this is the Hadith which states: “Verily Allah does not take away knowledge by snatching it from the people but He takes away knowledge by taking away the scholars, so that when He leaves no learned person, people appoint ignorant as their leaders. They are asked to deliver religious verdicts and they deliver them without knowledge, they go astray, and lead others astray.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari & Sahih Muslim*) If this is so, then the scholars are without doubt the keys for this knowledge.” (*al-Muwafaqat*)

Imam al-Shatibi (Allah have mercy on him) further mentions three signs and characteristics of an expert qualified teacher:

- 1) He practices what he teaches,
- 2) He himself has been trained by a qualified scholar,
- 3) His students follow and pursue in his footsteps, for if his students generally tend to not follow him, then this is a sign that there is something inherently wrong with him. (*ibid*)

There are many benefits and wisdoms in learning from a teacher: Sound understanding of the texts, its correct interpretation, being saved from making errors in understanding the texts (for each science has its own special terminologies),

getting questions and queries that may arise answered, practical application of the knowledge and obtaining the Baraka and light of guidance from that special teacher-student relationship are just a few to mention.

In conclusion, it is necessary for one that he learns his knowledge from a scholar of knowledge, piety and wisdom, and who himself has been taught and trained by a similar scholar. That does not mean it is incumbent for an individual that each time he picks up a book, he must find a scholar to teach him, rather one needs to study the fundamentals of each science with those who are qualified, thus become acquainted with the different terminologies, terms and expressions used. Thereafter, one may study a book on his own with always referring to senior scholars whenever something is unclear.

And Allah Knows Best

Mufti Muhammad ibn Adam al-Kawthari

Appendix: Shah Wali Allah is Tree of Paradise

Amir Shah Khan (Allah have mercy on him) personally heard from Mawlana Muhammad Qasim al-Nanautwi (Allah have mercy on him) that when Mawlana went for hajj, his ship had a stop at a Yemeni port for few days. He came to know that there is a senior elderly *muhaddith* who lived in a nearby town. Mawlana went to see him and requested him for *sanad* in hadith.

Yemeni scholar: Whom did you study hadith under?

Mawlana: From Shah ‘Abd al-Ghani (Allah have mercy on him).

[He was not aware of Shaykh Shah ‘Abd al-Ghani al-Dihlawi.]

Yemeni scholar: Who did Shah Abdul Ghani studied hadith from?

Mawlana: From Muhaddith Shah Ishaq al-Dihlawi (Allah have mercy on him).

[He was not aware of him either]

Yemeni scholar: Who did Shah Ishaq studied under?

Mawlana: Shah ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Dihlawi (Allah have mercy on him).

He was aware of Imam Shah ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and said that now I will surely give you *sanad* in hadith. And then he said:

“Imam Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi (Allah have mercy on him) is tree of Tuba. (Tuba is the name of a tree in Paradise) Just like anywhere there are branches of Tuba, Jannah is there and where ever there are no branches of Tuba there is no Jannah there. Similarly, where ever there is *silsila* of Shah Wali Allah, Jannah is there and where ever there is no *silsila* of him, Jannah is not there.”

(*Arwah al-Thalatha*, p.152-153)